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AUTHOR Wong, Shelley; Teuben-Rowe, Sharon
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ABSTRACT

Graduate students in an English-as-a-Second-Language education program at the University of Maryland were surveyed concerning suggested methods for incorporating languages other than English into the curriculum in a multicultural classroom. Respondents were master's and doctoral students from a variety of language backgrounds. The article details the resulting suggestions for these languages and cultures: Korean; Caribbean Island Nations; Hindi; Thai; and Turkish. Classroom behaviors and attitudes for teachers to both incorporate and anticipate include those addressing specific kinds of teacher-parent and teacher-student communication, respect for parents, language usage, classroom questions or lack of them, grading and other classroom teaching techniques, classroom environment, nonverbal behaviors and body language, and educational values. Teachers are also advised explicitly of things not to do in the classroom for each of the cultures. (Contains 9 references.) (MSE)

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Shelley Wong and Sharon Teuben-Rowe

ED 423 664

Honoring Students' Home Languages and Cultures in a Multilingual Classroom

Given that there are so many different cultural prohibitions in a culturally diverse classroom, is it possible for a teacher to build a working community? Won't a teacher inadvertently offend students and students offend each other? Why should we even bother with so many different languages and cultures when it's easier to teach everyone American culture in English?

Certainly, the possibility of cultural conflict is always a given whenever two or more different people have different assumptions about what to expect. It's important to air the differences and make explicit the cultural assumptions for each group. When we are able to see another point of view as just as valid as our own, we have the beginning of a working community. Critical to building an effective working community is the inclusion of adult models from diverse cultures and diverse knowledge bases or funds of knowledge in the community (Moll & Greenberg, 1990).

At the University of Maryland, most of the students in the College of Education are Americans. We asked international and bilingual and bicultural students in the M.Ed. TESOL and Ph.D. TESOL/Reading program to provide information for teachers on a cultural and pedagogical level. We were interested in supporting a positive view towards bilingualism rather than an "English-only" policy (Auerbach, 1995). Respecting and honoring the home languages and cultures helps students succeed in school (Nieto, 1992).

When home languages and cultures are included in the classroom, students feel that they do not have to "give up" their identity and background to learn English (Edelsky, 1996). When students realize that they can utilize the knowledge they have learned in their first language in their new classroom, they feel a sense of educational achievement and continuity. By honoring students first languages we show that we value bilingualism and encourage an "additive" view towards learning English, rather than a "subtractive" view that attempts to stamp out the first language and supplant it with English (Cummins, 1986). Research indicates that a teacher's sensitivity to the student's language and cultural background is conducive to classroom learning (Jimenez, 1994).

While the concept of honoring or celebrating students' home languages and cultures sounds positive, teachers may not always know how to incorporate them, when they don't know the languages themselves. It is not always easy, especially

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when there is more than one second language and students come from extremely diverse cultural backgrounds. While it is not unusual to see some teachers incorporate Spanish language into their classrooms, it is unusual to see teachers incorporate Hindi, Korean or Turkish. Some teachers opt not to even try to incorporate multiple languages out of fear of mispronouncing or offending students inadvertently.

Methodology

We asked bilingual and bicultural masters and doctoral students from a number of linguistic backgrounds to develop suggestions on 1) how to work with students and their parents and 2) how to incorporate languages that teachers may not know into the curriculum. The cultural and linguistic informants were all highly educated adults who were familiar with American culture and could provide a cross-cultural perspective. Some of the contributors had themselves, experienced "culture shock" in the U.S. They made a presentation of their suggestions to a class of Master's Certification students at the University of Maryland, received oral and written feedback. Presentations were revised to anticipate questions that had been raised by the Masters Certification students. The bicultural bilingual graduate students then presented at a local TESOL affiliate conference. Suggestions from five linguistic backgrounds: Korean, Caribbean Creoles, Hindi, Thai and Turkish appear below.

Korean

We often think of math as being universal and requiring little language. However, conceptually there are different ways of organizing numerical notation and number units may cause confusion cross-culturally. In China, Korea, Japan and some parts of Southeast Asia, the unit of numbers is made of four digits instead of three digits. For example, twenty thousand would be written as 2,0000 instead of 20,000. The first unit of four digits (ten thousand) is called ***man*** in Korean. For example, one million in Korean is called 100,0000, or *one hundred* ***man***.

Korean Numbers Activity

a) Write one ***man*** in numbers as you would write in the U.S.
b) How is thirty thousand read in Korean?
c) How is thirty-five thousand read in Korean?
d) How is two hundred thirty-five thousand read in Korean?
e) How is five ***man*** read in English?
f) How is one hundred fifty ***man*** read in English?

Answer key: a) 10,000; b) 3 man or 3,0000; c) 3 1/2 man or 3,5000; d) 23 1/2 man or 23,5000; e) 50,000; f) 1,500,000.

- Do ask Korean parents personally if they can help you for any instructional needs. They may be reluctant to volunteer (perhaps because of their English), even though they are willing to help.
- Do explain the goals of your instructional activities to Korean parents. Their concept of learning may be different from yours and they might be wondering when you will start to "teach".
- Do encourage Korean parents to use the Korean language at home to discuss school work. It's important to explain the concepts in Korean if children do not understand them when they are explained in English.
- Do take off your shoes when entering a Korean home.
- Don't ask Korean pupils to say their parents'

names, especially their first names. They are told that children are not supposed to say their parents' names. Let the child write the names or spell them so that they can avoid saying the names directly.

- Don't write a Korean name in red ink. It is believed that if a name is written in red ink, that person's mother will die.

The Caribbean Island Nations

Caribbean linguistic and cultural communities are primarily Dutch, English, French, or Spanish speaking. These are the languages of the former colonial powers. While the French and Spanish speaking islands have developed identifying accents and vocabulary, they are still largely linguistically unchanged, with the exception of Haiti. The English and Dutch communities (and Haiti) have developed prominent creoles which have evolved syntactically and phonologically from their European and African roots.

Papiamento, the creole of the Netherlands Antilles, is widely used in Aruba, Bonaire, and Curacao and has a regular written form. The English-speaking islands, however, are more numerous and are widely dispersed throughout the region. Their creoles have developed independent of one another and have not been afforded a written code. They are mixtures of West African (Twi, Yoruba, Wolof, etc.) grammars and vocabularies, Carib, Arawak, Hindi, and Spanish—all to varying degrees, depending on the immigration and migration patterns of the populations.

Generally, English-speaking Caribbeans are taught that the local vernacular is "slang" and do not recognize, as linguists do, that these creoles are complex and bona fide languages.

- Do use standard English with recent arrivals. Try to avoid colloquialisms and jargon, as they may not be understood and pupils may not ask what is meant. They do not want to appear "dunce", so will not ask basic questions.
- Do ask students if there are any questions. You may subtly get a pupil to repeat instructions to check on comprehension.
- Do call parents to tell them good things about their children. A parent teacher meeting is usually dreaded back home. Establish an inviting atmosphere upon the very first contact you make.
- Do encourage and support the ties with home language and culture. Encourage students to share folk tales, which is part of their oral tradition and heritage.
- Do ask about school back home as this can provide valuable information about the student's academic background.
- Don't assume that you can use a creole with a recent arrival, especially if you are not a native speaker of creole. Don't imitate Caribbean accents, even as a show of endearment. On many islands this is viewed as insulting.
- Don't assume that a lack of eye contact means that a student is not listening to you. Often staring an adult in the eye is seen as defiant or rude.
- Don't use the parent's first name on the initial meeting. This is viewed as demeaning and belittling, especially if the teacher is younger than the parent or guardian.

Hindi

Along with English, Hindi is the official language of India, but there are many other major Indian languages including Urdu, Tamil, Gujarati, and Bengali. If you have a student from India, ask about the home language, rather than assume that it is Hindi.

- Do smile at students to show approval.

- Do give grades.
- Do give tasks requiring memorization.
- Do give a lot of feedback to parents. They are vitally interested in their children's education. Elicit their help.
- Do give positive feedback to parents when you call them. They may assume that their child is behaving badly if you ask them to come to school for a meeting.
- Do expect students to work hard. Be demanding. Students from India are coming from an extremely competitive academic background and are capable of making a sustained effort in their studies.
- Do give students time to learn how to draw. Drawing is considered a leisure activity and not integrated into subject areas.
- Do give students time to learn how to be creative. In Indian schools, "facts" take precedence over "fancy".
- Don't be surprised if a relaxed, loosely structured class is confusing to new students.
- Don't be surprised if a student smiles while making an apology. This does not indicate lack of sincerity.
- Don't expect a student to look at you while being reprimanded. Indian children may look at their feet out of respect.
- Don't be surprised if an Indian student gets extremely upset when other children break rules.

Thai

Thai is the national official language of Thailand. Thai is classified by linguists as belonging to the Chinese-Thai branch of the Sino-Tibetan family. It is a tonal language, uninflected and predominantly monosyllabic. In Thailand students are obliged to pay respect to their teachers, parents, elders and Buddhist monks.

To greet someone in the traditional Thai manner, press your hands together, as though in prayer, keeping arms and elbows close to your body. Bow your head forward to touch your index fingers. This is called ***wai***. Thais will shake hands with Westerners but will be pleased if you greet them with ***wai***, a salutation that signifies respect.

- Do use ***wai*** for greeting and departing.
- Do be on time. Thais regard punctuality as a sign of courtesy.
- Do take your shoes off when you visit a Thai home. Look to see if the shoes are left outside.
- Do pass objects with the right hand.
- Do smile to excuse small inconveniences, to thank for small services and to return the ***wai*** of small children.
- Don't be surprised if students bow their heads as they walk past you. You are not obliged to return the bow.
- Don't point to anything with your foot. Feet are considered the lowliest part of the body and to signal with them is impolite.
- Don't touch students' hair, nor heads. It is considered the dwelling place of the soul.
- Don't throw anything. It is considered bad manners.
- Don't cross your legs, especially in front of an older person. When crossing the legs, cross only at the ankles, not one foot resting on a knee.

Turkish

Turkish is an Altaic language, written with a Latin alphabet. Turkish morphology is agglutinative, consisting of a root and one or more suffixes, each of which adds a bit of meaning to the root. Turkish syntax is "head-last" with the verb coming at the end.

Public school in Turkey is free from kindergarten to university, but is compulsory only through elementary school. Most working class students do

not continue past elementary school for financial reasons. Teachers are authority figures, viewed with awe by the working-class majority of the population. During the usual beginning of the school year, at the parent teacher group meeting, the parents are told how their child is to be made to study every evening. Any subsequent meeting requested by the teacher is dreaded, because it means the student is in trouble. Teachers typically expect a lesson to be introduced at home before it is covered in class.

- Do expect that Turkish students will be proficient in math and science. Strong emphasis is placed on mathematics and the sciences and Turkish students are exposed to a higher level of math than American students at any given grade.
- Do expect that Turkish parents will be anxious of their role as home educators, especially if their English is not very proficient.
- Do expect that Turkish parents may do the homework for their child. It is not generally recognized, by teachers or parents, that a student must do his/her own work in order to learn.
- Don't be surprised if you have to explicitly assign rather than merely "encourage" outside reading. Reading outside of required study is considered a waste of time in the average working class home.
- Don't be surprised if the parents feel that American schools are too permissive or lax in discipline. Corporal punishment is allowed by both teachers and school administrators in Turkey.

Discussion

When the Master's Certification students provided feedback to the presenters on incorporating home languages and cultures, there was a concern that they would offend their students: What happens when a teacher passes something to a Thai student with her/his left hand or writes a Korean child's name in red? Won't a teacher inadvertently offend students and students offend each other?

It is inevitable that students will experience culture shock. But it is incumbent for teachers to operate from a knowledge base which will facilitate their exploration of cultural differences so that they can mediate the linguistic and cultural barriers with their students. A starting point is to create a relationship with students so that they can begin to talk about their feelings and opinions.

Most important for us as teachers is to have an open attitude towards learning and to ask the students and their parents to serve as linguistic and cultural experts to the class (Wong & Teuben-Rowe, 1994). Once we incorporate the various cultural voices in our classroom we can see that while there are cultural differences, there are also many cultural similarities. For example, the high regard for education and for teachers is found in many cultures. While greetings may be different, they are an important ritualized event in every culture. Learning how to greet in different languages demonstrates appreciation and respect.

There are many ways to celebrate and honor various languages even if the teacher doesn't know the languages (Freeman & Freeman, 1994). Display different writing systems in the classroom. Discuss which languages have alphabets and compare those that do with those that have a different symbol system. Compare which languages are read from right to left with those read left to right or top to bottom. Encourage students to utilize their literacy skills in various languages to post holidays in the class calendar and greetings in class scrapbooks, posters, and bulletin boards. The first language is a resource to be treasured. Ask students and their parents to help you make and illustrate bookmarks with proverbs in various languages and their English translations. Encourage students to interview people

using their native language and report to the class. By doing so, the students' first languages will be a medium for them to continue to learn as they learn the second language and they will become bilingual interpreters for the class. Finally, why should we even bother with so many different cultures when it's easier to teach everyone American culture?

In many instances, children come from a society where they were members of a majority ethnic group. This may be the first time that they are in a multicultural society as members of an ethnic and linguistic minority (Spring, 1995). It's important to teach them how to function in the new society. This does not mean discarding or losing their previous social identity, but learning how to function and contribute within a new instructional conversation (Goldenberg, 1991). The sense of seeing what one has always viewed as normal, good and universal as suddenly becoming problematic is best achieved through open dialogue. Treating all children as blank slates, as Americans, truncates that connection to the children's previous home cultures and histories. Students develop new perspectives and new ways of relating to others best when they are not forced to negate their previous experiences. When they are able to be true to their own identities, they are able to grow by making sense of them through other people's eyes.

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Biographical Statement

Shelley Wong is an assistant professor at the University of Maryland, 2311 Benjamin Bldg., College Park, MD. 20742, 301 405-3136 SW86@umail.umd.edu

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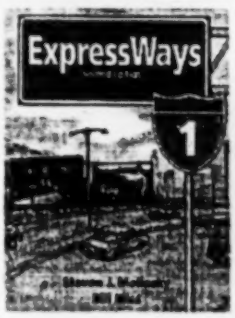

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